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Village Nocturne

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Three Poems · *Anurādhā Mahāpātra*

VILLAGE NOCTURNE

That village next to the refugee camp, all
headless sheep. The goddess of drought
comes here, *haritakī*-flowers and famine
in her hair. On the day of the angry immersion
under the esoteric *peepul*-tree, all those
old men will return, their silent corpses
on the edges of the paddy field when
the birds' eyes droop. By the *Terapekhyā*
River, with a straw sky and some rat poison,
sit women never touched by the sun.
Out of the hospital, accepting the calm
of the unforgiving bed's faithless night,
this village's stale grass, cold light
of the oil lamps, the *Rupnārāyan* River
and black money that knows the unholy consciousness,
all want the hedge-rooted child.
Beside the refugee camp, the wild *kalmī*-leaf
brings the savor of rice-paddy milk,
the goddess of drought in the *haritakī*'s flower.

Note: *Haritakī* is a bitter nut with medicinal properties, also used as an offering during *pūjās*. *Kalmī* is an aquatic plant with edible leaves, a common source of food in rural Bengal during times of famine.